

INFORMATION SHEET ADDRESSING THE SUPPLY OF BURIAL SITES  
IN CONCORD'S SLEEPY HOLLOW CEMETERY  
October 23, 2018

Abstract

*After updating the Master Plan, paying particular attention to the supply of gravesites, the Cemetery Committee, the Cemetery Superintendent and Cemetery Supervisor are holding a public information meeting to inform the public about proposals being considered for the cemetery. We wish to utilize available space to meet Concord's needs in ways that honor the cemetery's importance to the town. We welcome public commentary concerning a number of alternative burial categories including proposals for the addition of a columbarium and mausoleum sites.*

Concord's only active public cemetery presently contains over 10,000 gravesites. The first plot of land for burials opened in 1823 when the site was called New Hill Burying Ground. In 1855 the town bought additional land and held a formal dedication officially consecrating the land as Sleepy Hollow Cemetery. Ralph Waldo Emerson, on the Cemetery Committee at the time, gave the dedicatory oration. Since 1855 more land was purchased including the new section on Bedford Street east of the older area of the cemetery. The cemetery presents a picture of the town's history and culture from before the Civil War into the twenty-first century, a span of nearly 200 years if one counts from the first graves dated in the 1820s. The site is a destination for tourists, scholars and those on literary or historical pilgrimages; it is one of the most prominent "garden" cemeteries in Massachusetts and is on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Cemetery Committee is charged with overseeing the operation of public cemeteries and establishing their policies and regulations. It is responsible for providing policy guidance to the Superintendent of the Cemeteries in the care and management of these grounds, including maintaining a sufficient supply of interment places and the laying out of lots. As part of its charge the Committee is currently addressing the supply of interment sites and additional options for interment in the cemetery.

Aware of the increasing demand for cremation interments, the Superintendent and Cemetery Supervisor in conjunction with the Cemetery Committee have recently set aside a new section containing plots for the interment of cremated remains on the eastern side of the new area of the cemetery and have also been considering adding a columbarium for the interment of cremated remains on the western edge of the new area. Furthermore, over the past two and a half years the Committee has received two requests to purchase mausoleum plots; these have prompted consideration of adding up to six mausoleum sites adjacent to the existing Pope mausoleum in the old part of Sleepy Hollow near the Melvin Memorial.

### Why a Public Information Meeting on Gravesite Supply?

We are holding this public information meeting to inform the public about proposals the Committee is considering and to welcome public commentary regarding these proposals. Our aim is to use available space to meet Concord's needs in ways that honor the site's ongoing historical significance and its importance to the life of the town. We hope the community will reflect with us as we consider further development of cemetery grounds.

The Cemetery Committee has just completed a new Master Plan which can be found at <http://www.concordma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/16125/Cemetery-Master-Plan> or by going to <http://www.concordnet.org/1955/Town-of-Concord-Cemeteries>. In the section of the plan dedicated to the supply of gravesites the Committee calls for carefully utilizing available space in a manner respectful of the cemetery's place in the community. Currently, the supply includes single traditional gravesites and single cremation plots. These are available both to current and former Concord residents.

### Alternative Burial Categories

The Cemetery Committee is considering adding new categories for interment, chiefly a columbarium and mausoleums; the former would become the least expensive, and the mausoleum sites the most expensive interment options available in Sleepy Hollow Cemetery. A columbarium is a structure containing small filing vaults into which cremated remains are placed with a plaque identification system. A mausoleum is a small, stately building for the entombment of the bodies or remains of a number of individuals; it is nearly always for a single family. A mausoleum site in Sleepy Hollow would be, far and away, the most expensive interment method. The Committee has also investigated the use of public or community mausoleums. Such mausoleums are not as common as private ones, though such facilities exist around Boston. Funding a community mausoleum would be more complicated than doing so for private ones.

While primarily studying addition of more mausoleums and a columbarium, the Committee has also considered the concept known as a scattering garden. A scattering garden is a landscaped area dedicated to the placing of cremated remains without a specifically set-aside plot. The cremated remains are not usually literally scattered abroad but are rather placed in a small hole among flowers, ground-covering plants and other landscaping with a system of memorial plaques nearby commemorating those whose ashes are similarly placed nearby in the garden.

The Committee has been made aware of an increasing interest in what are known as "Green Burials." A green burial is one in which the body is not embalmed. The burial container is usually of soft wood or the body is wrapped in a shroud, and there is no cement grave liner. Currently, graves in Sleepy Hollow Cemetery require cement grave liners. In the green burial method of interment the container or body is instead placed directly in the soil, often at a somewhat shallower depth than in conventional burial, to foster natural biodegradation. Often the headstone, if used, is fieldstone. This method is legal in Massachusetts where state law does not require use of a grave liner or vault.

### Current State of Supply

There is ample burial space to supply the town to about 2050 for traditional burials and the burial of cremated remains. Currently about one hundred gravesites from our supply are being used per year. In 2017 there were 90 interments at Sleepy Hollow Cemetery. Of the interments 26 were full burials and 64 were cremations. Lot sales for the year totaled 63. In 2016 there were 109 interments at Sleepy Hollow Cemetery; of these, 40 were full burials and 69 were cremations. Lot sales for 2016 totaled 74. Future needs will require careful analysis of unused town land which may presently exist as forest or as leased farmland adjoining cemetery land. In the meantime the committee has been studying ways to make available additional options for burial.

Space for both traditional burial and the burial of cremated remains in the older part of Sleepy Hollow Cemetery is in very short supply. Occasionally lots in the old part become available when present owners no longer wish to hold them and so sell them back to the cemetery. These rare plots in the older part of Sleepy Hollow are more expensive than ones in the new area. There is a waiting list for purchase of lots in the old portion of the cemetery, but many lots are available in the cemetery's new area.

### Mausoleums

In the older part of Sleepy Hollow there is a space resource that has not been utilized along the hillside just north of the Melvin Memorial where the only mausoleum now in the cemetery is located—the Pope Tomb. That site was purchased in 1929 and the tomb built around that time. The ninety-year old tomb is made of granite, a combination of rough- and smooth-faced stone. A segmented, arched pediment surmounts the central iron door. It was thought when it was built that other mausoleums could be placed along that same hillside, though no further development of this area has been pursued. The cemetery committee has determined there is space for up to six additional mausoleums along the hillside to the north of the one now existing, an area that is not practical for use for other burial purposes. These are premium spaces, the high cost of which could provide very significant income for use in maintaining and improving the entire cemetery.

Cemetery Superintendent Dan Rowley, Cemetery Supervisor Tish Hopkins and representatives of the Cemetery Committee have looked at mausoleums in historic cemeteries around Boston. We believe additional mausoleums in Sleepy Hollow Cemetery could constitute a useful, tasteful and welcome addition to the supply of gravesites if they are built to fit the historic context of the cemetery. These privately funded complements to the cemetery landscape could provide means through their premium cost to supply funding for a columbarium and could also provide monies for the repair of monuments, headstones and stone boundary walls, for rebuilding of rock walls, the improvement of pathways and cemetery drainage, and for landscape beautification of cemetery lands.

### Columbaria

The Committee, Cemetery Superintendent and the Cemetery Supervisor have looked at columbaria when visiting cemetery sites around Boston and have considered photographs and videos to do with their construction and landscaping. We have learned such an installation might house cremated remains at the most affordable costs to the public while using relatively little space and adding to the cemetery's current supply. A columbarium of moderate size might contain 240 niches. If 10 of these niches were purchased per year, this would provide a useful supplement to the existing supply for some 24 years. Additional columbaria could be added when needed. A handsomely designed and landscaped columbarium could be placed in the new section on a gently sloping site on the cemetery's western edge next to wooded wetlands.

### Scattering Garden

Several local cemeteries have scattering gardens for the burial of cremated remains. In these sites the location of the cremated remains is not marked as they would be if they were interred in a private lot, but landmarks such as a bench or stone may be noted for an approximate interment location. A scattering garden might one day be placed in the area opposite the Melvin Memorial, or put in the new area of the cemetery.

### Green Burial

This method of burial in Sleepy Hollow Cemetery would probably require the opening of a separate new burial ground. Combining the current burial method and that used for green burial in the same area is not practical because the current system depends on uniform use of concrete vaults. The current system also allows for orderly burial of one casket next to another; digging new graves often involves use of heavy machinery which could disturb neighboring graves if they were without the protection of concrete grave liners. Other issues, such as protecting shallower graves from being disturbed in various ways, would also need to be addressed.

### Summary

The Concord Cemetery Committee, the Cemetery Superintendent and the Cemetery Supervisor are committed to ensuring that Sleepy Hollow Cemetery continues to be a place where those who have passed away are honored and where the living can be refreshed in beautiful surroundings. At present, our primary interest is opening a few new plots for mausoleums and considering the construction of a columbarium. We are additionally interested in the possibility of adding a scattering garden and, in the future, studying possibilities for green burial. We are committed to seeing that the addition of any new means of interment be pleasing to the citizens of our town and historically and aesthetically true to the role the cemetery occupies in Concord.